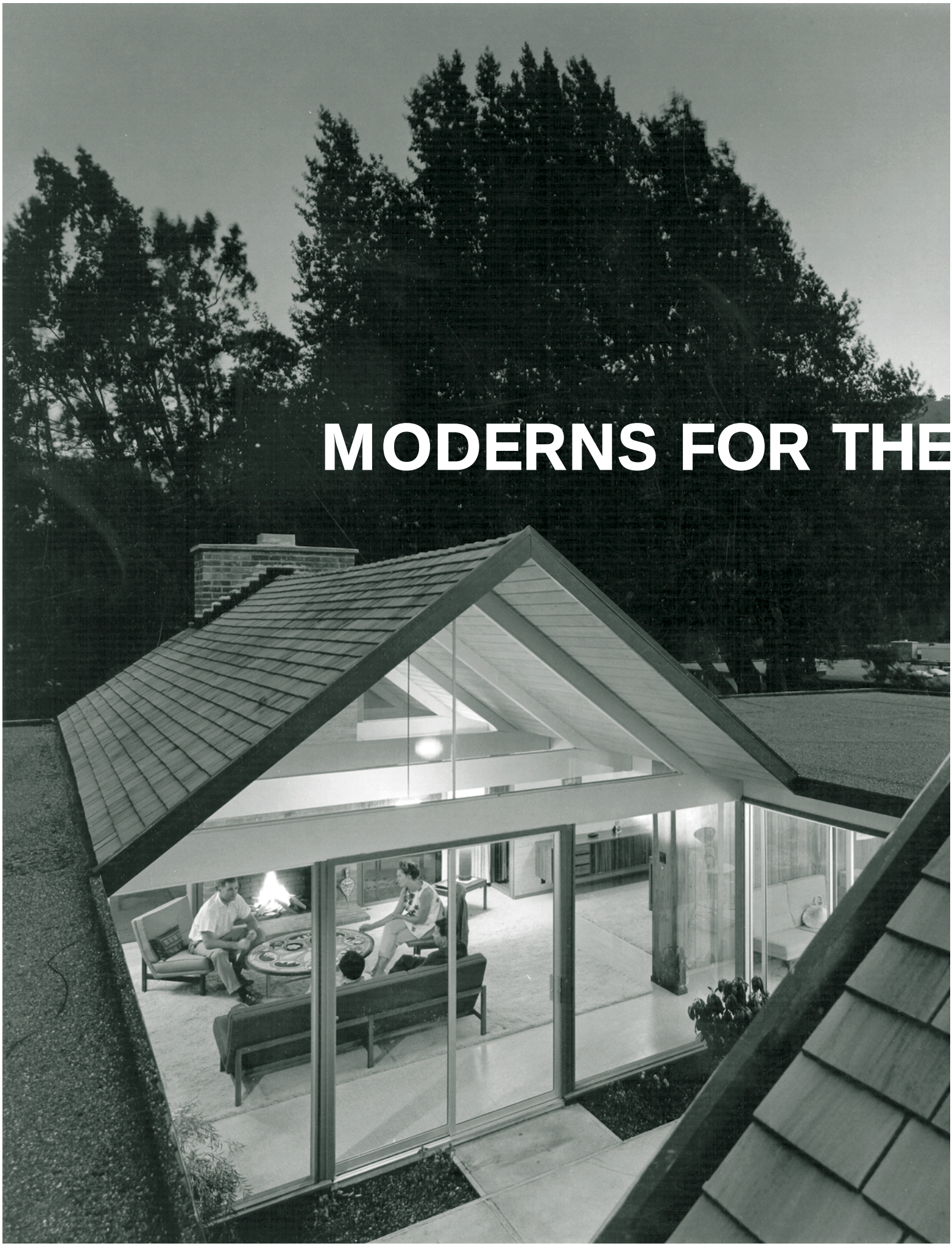
MODERNS FOR THE

MASSES

THE SUBURBAN IDYLL OF EICHLER HOMES

OVER THE GOLDEN GATE, south on Highway 101 down the San Francisco Peninsula, lies the legacy of the postwar boom: chockablock subdivisions, cheek-by-jowl, around the bowl of the bay. Yet, if you look close enough, another legacy lives on in coveys from San Jose to Palo Alto, north to Marin County, and east over the Oakland hills—the space age progeny of Eichler Homes.

They were not so much houses as "machines in the garden"—descendants of Frank Lloyd Wright and Germany's Bauhaus—with command pod kitchens, wingspread roof lines ready for takeoff, and windows to the sky.

The Eichlers touched down in California circa 1950, seat of the car culture ramping up in burgeoning suburbs across the country. The automobile was the star of the American dreamscape, a rocketship on the road with torqueflite transmission, taillights like afterburners, and windshields in widescreen. VJ Day meant the future was here, and everything from hair dryers to hanging lamps went along for the ride.

Effused *Architectural Forum,* the Eichlers "hit the public like a new car model, with all the drawing power of new design and the latest engineering." A two-tone Chevy with rocket fins was right at home with the Jetsonesque facade, nestled under the wing of a cantilevered carport.

Of course there was more than that going on under the hood.

The Eichlers were unmistakable in their modernity, their single stories hugging the ground, facades fairly opaque from the street, with flat or low-pitched roofs, some with steep, jocular gables. "Stark" some said, yet the simple, Asian-flavored fronts were a perfect foil for landscaping.

A. QUINCY JONES ARCHITECTURE ARCHIVES

Between 1949 and 1974, Joseph Eichler, a former executive with Nye and Nisson—a foods distributor run by his in-laws—erected 11,000 homes, most in the Bay Area. Defying conventional wisdom, the maverick builder sought to bring modernism to the masses, tapping a niche of buyers with champagne taste and a beer budget—"people with upper class taste and lower middle class incomes," says his son Ned in *Eichler: Modernism Rebuilds the American Dream,* a new book by architect Paul Adamson, Marty Arbunich, and Ernie Braun, the architectural photographer who originally shot the homes.

Eichler sold to anyone who wanted his product, period. In the days when racial covenants were common, he resigned from the National Association of Home Builders in protest of discrimination policies.

"My father never held a hammer, a saw, or a wrench in his hand. Still, he became a master builder," adds Ned. He had no design training, either. Many say his genius was in finding talent. Robert Anshen, a founding partner of Eichler Homes and its first architect, picked up the builder's challenge on a dare.

Eichler recruited a stable of progressive, empathic artists to design his projects, says Adamson. Anshen and partner Stephen Allen, notables in their own right, were soon joined by the firm of A. Quincy Jones and Frederick Emmons, who went on to win an achievement award from the American Institute of Architects. Claude Oakland, another architectural heavyweight, was another long-time contributor.

Prefiguring management ideas of coming decades, Eichler cultivated a team approach between the architectural firms, mixing up a cocktail of high modern and California casual, taste-enhanced with top flight landscape designers like Thomas Church. "Delighting the customer" was no mere catch phrase; the architects went door to door after owners moved in, getting feedback to nurture the next set of designs.

Eichler and his architects devised a nimble construction process, mostly from prefab parts, that gave buyers a formidable bang for the buck. It was big living in a small package—seemingly much larger than the 1,000 square feet of the first homes—thanks to a near-constant nudge of the design envelope.

And today, amid efforts to reshape the suburbs, the sleek and sexy "Thunderbird of developer housing" is getting a fresh eye from a new breed of owner—in part the customer catered to by Ikea, Crate & Barrel, Design within Reach, and other purveyors of good design for the masses. Says former Eichler resident Ron Crider, "The modernist aesthetic raised consciousness in this country about design at its best. We see a resurgence of this today as design again has become the center of all things new. The 'less is more' concept truly is beneficial to us all as we grapple with economic and environmental issues." Indeed, the Eichler has new relevance as a swath of structures becomes potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, from an era that's a challenge in terms of what to preserve [see stories on pages 4 and 10].

Unfortunately, not all is blue skies around the bay. "The blessing and the curse of Eichlers is that many happen to sit in the heart of Silicon Valley, where tastes among the newly rich often run to freshly built Tuscan villas and medieval chateaus," writes Patricia Leigh Brown in the *New York Times*. "The Eichlers are particularly vulnerable to the teardown syndrome."

Eichlers have always lived in a world of larger forces.

LEFT: W. P. WOODCOCK, RM SCHINDLER COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM, UC SANTA BARBARA; RIGHT: JULIUS SCHULMAN

Gamble in Modern

At war's end, lured by Federally insured mortgages, ex-GIs, defense workers, and young marrieds streamed out of the cities in search of a slice of life in the embryonic outskirts. To meet the demand, the government estimated that over a million houses were needed every year for a decade.

Above: Eichler's savvy marketing targeted those who dreamed of a custom but couldn't afford the ticket: educated, with taste and a modernist bent. "They were somewhat adventurous and often creative," says Adamson—artists and professionals commuting to San Francisco from Marin; doctors, architects, and advertising people; Stanford researchers and aerospace engineers from San Jose. "A sort of pipe-smoking, sports-car-driving, modern-art-buying hipster" was a popular ad-agency stereotype, Adamson says.

contemporary influences

Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra

"THE PRIMARY MATERIAL OF UTOPIA was sheet glass"—says Robert Hughes in *Shock of the New*—yet this Viennese pair brought the language of light to California a decade before their Bauhaus brethren fled Hitler to re-shape America through architecture. Being modern meant a moral stance, and the two friends, ex-employees of Frank Lloyd Wright, linked up with like minds in 1920s Los Angeles. | NEUTRA'S commission for naturopath Dr. Philip Lovell—a *Los Angeles Times* columnist who advocated bodybuilding and vegetarianism—was "like a beacon of a brave new world," says Thomas Hines in *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*. Outdoor sleeping porches, private decks for nude sunbathing, and a commodious pool promoted communion with nature. In composition, the steel, glass, and concrete villa tumbles down a hillside (near left), a nod to the twining shapes and volumes of Cubism and de Stijl. | CULTIVATING NATURAL vistas enhanced health, Neutra believed, and small houses profited most from the endeavor. In the quest for the low-cost, replicable prefab, he relied on "simpler, lighter, more modern, more skeletal, more industrial means" than his peers, says Hines. | SCHINDLER COURTED an often bohemian clientele with a sculptural style typified by his own communal abode and Pueblo Ribera Courts (far left) from the 1920s. "He combined the massive with the delicate," says Adamson. "So often his houses were part cave, part tent." Such idiosyncrasies could keep him out of the spotlight. "That frequently happened to the modernists," Adamson adds. "If they were too individually expressive, they fell out of favor with the tastemakers." Neutra, by contrast, was a go-getter with a smart sense of sell.

Above: Ernie Braun's impossibly idyllic images were a focal point of the market push, which also deployed a sharp sales team. Catherine Munson started out "in a fluff position" as a $3-an-hour part-time hostess, she says in the *Eichler Network*. "Hostesses were to be some sweet little housewives who told the potential buyers as they walked through how groovy it was to live in an Eichler home. We were supposed to look pretty and decorative, demonstrate the swivel table, and serve chocolate milk and graham crackers to the kids." Munson, with a dual masters in microbiology and microchemistry, was soon sitting pretty as the first female "salesman."

It was a bonanza for builders. In Lakewood, California, a newly minted community, house starts hit a 100-a-day clip.

Still, it was uncommon to find tract developers consorting with architects. The ubiquitous "rancher" dominated the market. Eichler sought to distinguish his product.

It's not clear what led him to modern. It may have been Frank Lloyd Wright, says Adamson. In the early 1940s, at loose ends over his work life, Eichler happened to be renting one of Wright's Usonian homes, the Bazett House, in Hillsborough, California. The Usonians were a pared down version of Wright's fare for well heeled clients, an attempt to address the urgent problem of mass housing. Yet the Usonian houses were too custom and too expensive to replicate on a large scale.

Eichler's goal, in his initial tracts after the war, was a house that could be built efficiently, yet flex to afford design permutations, avoiding the cookie-cutter look when lined up along a street. He soon discovered that hiring architects was the key.

Robert Anshen took several pages from the Wright catechism—natural wood interiors, heated slab-on-grade floors, large expanses of glass, and a captivating sense of space. All were to become hallmarks of the Eichler home.

The first offerings by Anshen and Allen sold out in two weeks: 1,044 square feet of high design for $9,500, including appliances.

But this was more than a house. It was a blueprint for the American dream.

Better Living Through Architecture

Many of California's young architects mixed a penchant for the modern with American can-do optimism, stirring in a belief in architecture as a path to a better life. Modernism meshed with the emerging California culture—unpretentious socially, embracing the outdoors—with a growing economy based on aerospace and electronics.

Eichler and his architects believed that good houses did not stand alone;

they had to add up to a vibrant, livable community with places to play, shop, worship, and send the kids to school—a high-density, shared landscape with a sense of itself and its occupants.

A. Quincy Jones saw his work with Eichler as a laboratory for ideas. Yet the architectural mantra stayed the same over the years: attention to the user, orientation to light, sensitivity to surroundings, interplay between house and garden, and a drive for labor-saving methods. Add to that simplicity of design and expressive use of materials, and you get the picture.

Eichlers were unmistakable in their modernity, their single stories hugging the ground, facades fairly opaque from the street, with flat or low-pitched roofs, some with steep, jocular gables. "Stark" some said, yet the simple, Asian-flavored fronts were a perfect foil for landscaping. Vertical tongue-in-groove redwood was a featured cladding before Korean War shortages set in; later it was a mix of custom plywood, concrete block, and other proletarian materials favored by the California modernists.

The idea was to capture the outdoors and build a house around it, extending the living area out through great sweeps of glass all the way to the fence at the rear of the property. The backyard—usually "left to the weeds and the buyer's imagination" in the words of one publication of the day—completed the tableau, in the models sculpted by the likes of Thomas Church, a modernist who favored plants indigenous to the region, then a radical idea. Eichler charged a premium for this "lot line-to-lot line experience," but buyers went for it, and other builders followed suit.

The architects sought to shape the view from every aspect (and shield for privacy), even in densely populated areas. In Marin County, gables frame the chiseled hills that define the nature of the place.

In some models, you walk in the front door and step back outside, via an open-air court that daringly dissolves indoors and out, animated by cross views. At night, aquarium-like, it emits a languid light under twinkling stars; during the day, it's open to fleecy clouds and sky. Occasionally trees poke out to punctuate roof lines.

Inside, a host of unorthodox features vamp on the vibe. "In keeping with the modernist spirit," says Adamson, "outdoor panels often overlapped interior spaces at the glass walls," further blurring the out-in boundary. Easy-clean waxed-cork tile, resilient in a rich honey hue, graces the floors of the first models. In the narrow galley kitchens, masonite sliders sub for swinging cabinet doors, an intrusion and a hazard. Finger-sized pulls, bored into the masonite, obviate the need for hardware.

In most homes, a bank of cabinets seems to float over the countertop, separating kitchen from family room with a swish of style. Often the spaces modulate with a minimal move like a subtle shift in floor material. The open-plan kitchen, a command post where "mom could keep an eye on the kids," in the parlance of the day, proved immensely popular.

"The rooms were less thoroughly defined than in a traditional house," says Adamson. "One is not relegated to dining in a room set aside for dining, it's part of the general living space. The sliding glass meant you could move very easily from outdoors to in."

There was a sense of freedom, a sense of calm, a sense of being in touch with nature.

There was nothing like an Eichler.

"There is an almost Zen-like quality to an Eichler home," says Adamson. "Where the Western eye is predisposed to interpreting empty space as a void or an absence of things, in Japan empty space is viewed as the presence of possibilities."

Aware that the hard-edge geometrics might seem unyielding to a customer's decorating touch, Eichler hired Matt Kahn, a design professor at Stanford, to bring the models

"IF YOU WERE SCOUTING for images of a new, relaxed, and open kind of domestic life, southern California was a natural," says Thomas Hines of the postwar years in *Blueprints for Modern Living*. Yet the Los Angeles-based *Arts+Architecture* magazine did more than proffer pictures of a sunny future—it built places to live it in. | TO EDITOR JOHN ENTENZA, prefabs were the answer to the housing crisis. Between 1945 and 1966, thanks to his sponsorship, California's top architectural talent crafted steel, glass, concrete, and wood into some of the most innovative and influential houses ever constructed (like Case Study House #18, by Rodney Walker, below). | THEY MIXED THE MACHINE AESTHETIC with the Johnny-come-marching-home can-do of an army that built bridges with oil drums. Stir in a dash of Southwest pueblo, add a dab of the early California modernists, and you're cooking with gas. Stocked with high-style furnishings donated by leading manufacturers, the homes became stage sets for the pages of the magazine. People lined up to see them. | YET FOR ALL THE PREFAB PRETENSE, the houses couldn't be mass produced at a low cost. They were still stand-alone customs, the initial models lacking a model neighborhood. At Levittown on the East Coast, by contrast, people bought a lifestyle, not just the four walls around them. | ENTENZA AND HIS ARCHITECTS, who targeted the elite, saw themselves united in a sternly rational view of the future. Yet "the one penchant they all possessed, one which they failed to see and would vigorously have denied, was the quality of being profoundly romantic," says Hines. "As modernist 'true believers' girded by a sense of millenialist mission, they subscribed to the cult of the 'romantic engineer' as the fixer, the doctor of civilization's ills."

RODNEY WALKER

It was luxury without ornament, simplicity without austerity. Next to the dowdy homes glutting the market at the time, the Eichlers were light, fresh, and modern—patio living served sunny-side up, California-style.

A. QUINCY JONES ARCHITECTURE ARCHIVES

Below and right: Braun's photos "show stylish, casual furniture and blissed-out models seemingly caught unaware in the act of being modern," writes Susan Kuchinskas in the *San Francisco Examiner*. Yet the very modernity of the product sometimes made for a hard sell. Many people "simply didn't understand the houses," says salesperson Munson. Plus, the competition had a pack of barbs aimed at the Eichler, like its supposed flammability. "We had an explanation for every

objection," Munson says. She told buyers, "Imagine the house cut into two diagonal parts. On the one side, the master bedroom, the study, the living room, the dining room—the adult side of the house. On the other side, the kitchen, the family room, the three children's bedrooms. 'Isn't that interesting,' they would say."

to life. Kahn, also a painter, dramatized the flexibility by turning the houses into a work of theater. Along with his wife Lyda, a weaver, he pushed the palette with an array of animated accents: feather duster bouquets, lab flasks filled with colored water, cheeses and salamis slung from the kitchen ceiling. Whimsical still lifes, tribal art, and antiques coexisted with contempo classics by George Nelson and Charles Eames. The two made much of the artwork themselves, often paired with pieces from the Stanford Art Museum.

In a tour de force of skill, a promotional exhibit called "Art About the House," the duo placed the work in a play of the unexpected—in the fireplace, on the backyard fence—provoking an unconventional take on house and garden. Customers took notice, and so did *Life* magazine.

The eclectic aesthetic, says Adamson, married America's much-publicized ascendance in modern art with the public's exposure to foreign influences wrought by the war.

Kahn, artistic consultant for a decade, developed signature colors—Cabot stains in earthy hues like brown and green for the outside and Zolatone for the kitchen. A thick, plasticized industrial coating suitable for boat hulls, Zolatone had a spatter pattern that could hide stains. Kahn got the manufacturer to retool the spatters to a smaller, residential scale. The result was a variegated surface of multicolored flecks on a contrasting background.

Kahn's own house (an Eichler, naturally) still models the look: The kitchen, a riot of color with Zolatone cabinetry, takes a sharp left from the living room's neutrals, where the upbeat-hued cushions and '60s mod-striped lamp from Italy carry the tonal scheme.

You don't have to go modern to be modern, Kahn says, in response to today's trend of turning Eichlers into retro sets replete with reel-to-reel tape decks, Danish teak ice buckets, and orange globe barbecues.

It was luxury without ornament, simplicity without austerity. Next to the dowdy homes glutting the market at the time, the Eichlers were light, fresh, and modern—patio living served sunny-side up, California-style. Success was swift.

Still, the avant-garde Eichlers weren't everybody's taste. The very features that the faithful thought splendid, says Adamson, put off other potential buyers. Some "found the innovative engineering intimidating, the indoor-outdoor relationship uncomfortable, the open plan lacking in privacy, and the exposed construction insubstantial." Says Kahn, "For most people, these houses were severe."

Yet they were a darling of the shelter magazines, an icon of the trend-setting West Coast lifestyle. Says Thomas Hines in *Blueprints for Modern Living*: "Month after month, readers throughout the country were whisked from Silverlake or Brentwood to Beverly Hills, Pasadena, and Hollywood to look at California houses. The *Readers Guide* lists four times as many references to California domestic architecture as to that of any other state from 1945 to 1947."

California was the place to be.

Open to Innovation

When it came to erecting an Eichler house, the soul of the machine was a skeleton of hefty columns spaced five or six feet apart, skyscraper style, topped with wide beams. At a time when most homes were "stick-built," with wood studs a foot-and-a-half apart, the post-and-beam system was perhaps the key innovation integral to the vocabulary of sweeping space, striking proportions, and floor-to-ceiling glass.

The system was speedy and malleable, needing fewer structural elements than conventional construction. Cantilevered eaves—an inexpensive by-product—became a signature in the Eichlers, stretched six feet over south-facing windows.

Because the roof rests entirely on the post-and-beam frame, Adamson says, "none of the walls are load bearing, and both inside and outside partitions can be exceptionally lightweight. In fact, it was common to refer to the exterior cladding as a lightweight 'skin' fastened to the structural skeleton."

Nonetheless, the houses were tricky to assemble; there was little room for error and nothing to waste. Although most builders staged tasks sequentially—the subdivision a series of sites like a stationary assembly line—Eichler's way was rigorous, says Adamson. "By dividing the construction into twelve separate operations, each with its own crew, Eichler was able to pare down the work so that no single task took more than a day to complete . . . At the end of any workday, he could drive through a subdivision and evaluate its progress. Wherever he spotted an incomplete task, he knew there was a problem." Eichler leveraged large scale purchases with suppliers, getting a better product and price.

contemporaneous contemporaries

Arapahoe Acres, Colorado

ARAPAHOE ACRES, the first postwar subdivision on the National Register of Historic Places, weds the hard edge of the industrial aesthetic with the cozier touch of Frank Lloyd Wright. Each of the 124 homes, built between 1949 and 1957 just outside Denver, is an essay in expressive materials—stone, brick, concrete block, wood, glass—unified by an austere palette of earth tones. Their horizontal shapes, in a dance of angles counterpoised with the broad streets, sit in a landscape of sweeping, park-like views. | IN 1950, the initial units sold even before the press trumpeted the opening of the model, dressed up with furnishings by Knoll and Herman Miller. *Life* featured the "fine, mass-produced houses" in an article called "Best Houses Under $15,000." | EUGENE STERNBERG, who designed the first offerings, left after a rift with builder Edward Hawkins over the goal of low-cost housing. Hawkins, who valued style over economy, took over as architect, having studied Wright's handiwork up close while a contractor in Chicago. He tackled the job with a passion, down to personally supervising the mixing of the exterior colors. Original residents recall his advice (still followed today): "When in doubt, use putty." | AS WITH MANY modern houses, privacy was the byword. Much of Arapahoe Acres hides behind screened forecourts, narrow entry halls, and plantings designed to make homes recede into their sites. Inside, the living, dining, and kitchen areas flow in one dramatic sweep, with bedrooms and bathrooms clustered for quiet. Outside, hidden lights sculpt the nighttime facades.

Initially the post-and-beam system challenged the foreman and his crews. "In construction, something unconventional—regardless of the fact that it may intrinsically cost less, will cost more—because builders are unfamiliar with it," says Adamson. Once the crews got past the learning curve, the regimen ran well.

Generally, Eichler's architects tuned their innovations to the construction industry's abilities, at a time when America's war machine had seduced many with the dream of the factory-built house. Not that the industry did not present its own obstacles. In the early 1950s, building codes lagged behind technical innovations—often requiring heavier construction than necessary—and Eichler had to go to Washington to lobby the FHA, whose mortgage evaluators were scoring modern homes lower because they were a perceived poor investment, a passing fad.

"Eichler was a relentless go-getter who knew what he wanted, how to get to it, and how to get around the roadblocks and even his own shortcomings," says Marty Arbunich, Adamson's co-author. "He refused to be swayed by associates or competitors who saw greater profits in design shortcuts and inferior materials."

Tracts for the Future?

"Seen in a group—and Upper Lucas Valley [in Marin County] is one of the best-preserved Eichler groupings anywhere—the simplicity and near uniformity of the homes is hypnotic," writes Dave Weinstein in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "A horsewoman heads for the trails that start where the streets end. Oak- and chaparral-dotted hillsides, so typically California, so normal, make the rest of the neighborhood seem odder still. It's just the houses, the beautiful hills, and the sky." The place has its own community center, pool, stables, cable TV—and no utility lines.

While tracts in the New Urbanist mode invoke traditional imagery to sell the suburb of the future, the Eichlers, once dissed as relics, look to some like the future is here. Not all agree.

"Eichlers legitimized the worst aspects of suburban sprawl and the complete destruction of the street as a public space," Daniel Solomon, a San Francisco architect and UC Berkeley professor, told the *Chronicle* after speaking at a forum on Eichlers sponsored by the university. With their near-blank facades, the homes turn their face from the street, says Solomon, and the subdivisions—some far from town centers, with "residents only" recreation facilities—are a formula for insular living.

"They're part of the abandonment of cities and older neighborhoods that we're only now starting to recover from," he said. "It only makes sense to look at Eichlers in that context."

Says Adamson, "The Eichlers get pounced on as part of suburban sprawl, elegant though they may be. They may differ from the New Urbanist ideal, but still fit what the average buyer seems to want. A sense of privacy, where you turn your living room to the backyard, suits the way people feel about their home, and has since the '50s and '60s when the middle class, freed from apartment living, began to cultivate more private lives. The notion of everybody having a front porch with eyes on the street is not really the way people feel about life in the suburbs. We've transformed in our relationships, for better or worse, by virtue of the car and the way we live and work."

It only makes sense to use forms to suit that sensibility, he says, and to that degree Eichlers still fill the bill. "You can choose. You're not forced to the front to confront your neighbors. You can choose to meet them at the community center or at the park. Otherwise your house is your place of repose after work."

Yet, given the chance to re-do the Eichler formula, he wouldn't. "Building single family units on quarter-acre lots is becoming irresponsible, because we're chewing up nature and farmland. It's better to densify." Adamson looks to Frank Lloyd Wright's idea of a four-home cluster, with each unit turned outward for privacy.

Which makes the remaining Eichlers rare birds indeed. Today, the houses go for half a million dollars and up, and untouched gems fetch top dollar. Meanwhile others masquerade as high-

Left: "How much more pleasant a room is if it has light coming in from both sides," Munson would tell potential buyers. Interior designer Matt Kahn brought his own voice to the promo packaging. He advised Eichler, "On Sundays, when people are coming through the model homes in large numbers, you should roast a turkey in the oven, you should smell food in the house." This was especially important, he says, "because one of the big criticisms was that [the open plan meant that] you couldn't isolate the kitchen odors from the rest of the house. You had to turn that to an advantage."

LEFT AND FAR LEFT: DIANE WRAY

end haciendas or pink stucco palaces, with Corinthian columns, Doric columns, picket fences, brick walks, multipane windows, Spanish tile, and lace curtains. In Atherton, California, a 3,000-square-foot Eichler—a rare custom house on an acre lot—sold for $6.5 million, almost a million over the asking price, and the buyers razed it. Some cave to the McMansion urge, tacking on another story—a dissonant note on the jazzy low-slung spreads.

Eichlers resist updating. The best road to renovation, architects say, is to stick close to the original. K.C. Marcinik, of Greenmeadow Architects in Palo Alto, strives for a "hyper-Eichler" effect, with modern wood cabinets and ceiling beams tricked out in potent hues like orange or mint green. In the bedrooms she deploys contrasty colors to foster a sense of spaciousness. You can't turn an Eichler into something it's not, she says.

A new legion of owners carries the gospel. In Upper Lucas Valley, homeowners stick to the original exterior tones. And the roofline is sacrosanct—no TV antennas, no second floors. An architectural committee reviews proposed renovations, backed by county enforcement. Muses resident Frank LaHorgue, a junior executive for Eichler in the 1960s, "Is it worth letting your neighbors as a group set standards for your property? Sales prices here in Lucas Valley run $100,000 to $150,000 more than the Marinwood Eichlers a half mile down the road."

A small group of committed preservationists, called "Historic Quest," is pursuing nomination of two Palo Alto neighborhoods for the National Register of Historic Places—Green Gables (1950) and Greenmeadow (1954-1955). For activists, raising awareness is a prime directive. The Eichler Network—a publishing operation with a tabloid and a formidable Web presence, run by Arbunich—takes the message to the masses on all things Eichler, from fixing roofs and siding to crafting architectural guidelines for neighborhoods.

Arbunich, acknowledging the guidelines' importance (places with them are the most intact), says that "subtle, long-term education, instilling pride of ownership, is the way to get to people. Hitting them over the head with 'stop doing that' doesn't work." Over the last decade, he says, "the attitude of homeowners has changed quite a bit with the exposure to what's going on in other neighborhoods. People are more actively opposing second stories, monster homes, and teardowns." Clearly, residents are engaged, evidenced by the crackling commentary on the Eichler Network's Web forum.

"The modern house, with its simplicity, efficient use of space, abundant privacy, and easy coexistence with natural surroundings is an antidote to the materialism and frantic pace of life today," says forum contributor LaHorgue. "When I see the ugly hodge-podge of structures that has arisen around beautiful Marin County, I am convinced that we Eichler owners should do all we can to keep our homes modern."

The Eichler home remains a place to hang your heart as well as your hat, just as it was for the builder and his architects. Says Ron Crider, "Living in an Eichler is more than just living in a house. It's living in an ideal and a piece of history."

Eichler: Modernism Rebuilds the American Dream examines the complete legacy of Joseph Eichler and Eichler Homes. For information, go to the Eichler Network on the Web at www.eichlernetwork.com. Co-author Paul Adamson, AIA, is currently with the San Francisco firm of Hornberger+Worstell, Inc. He lives in Kensington, California. Contact Adamson by e-mail at adamson@hwiarchitects.com. Co-author Marty Arbunich is director-publisher of the Eichler Network, a Bay Area company devoted exclusively to preserving the lifestyle surrounding Eichler homes. He lives in San Francisco. Contact Arbunich by e-mail at info@eichlernetwork.com. Ernie Braun's career in photography began six decades ago, and he served during World War II as a combat photographer. He lives in San Anselmo, California. View a portfolio of his images on the Eichler Network, www.eichlernetwork.com.

Above and left: "We showed how this was regional architecture designed for a benign climate, perfect for the Bay Area," says Munson. "And we put a huge emphasis on the 'no stairs,' and how the levelness of the house induced you to keep going outdoors." Today, Munson takes the message to a new generation, in her own realty firm specializing in Eichlers. "It's a home with a lot of emotion and a lot of passion," says daughter Shelly, an agent, who grew up in an Eichler. "They are really homes that wrap around you."